

A Review of Guided Reading Cue Systems and Strategies

Children use cues and strategies to help them unlock the concepts of print and the meaning of text. The ways in which a child uses the cues and strategies can tell the teacher a great deal about what that child knows about reading. These cues are

- **Meaning (semantics):** based on children's prior knowledge and their sense of story. Meaning cues also come from the text and illustrations.
- **Structure or grammar (syntax):** based on children's understanding of grammatical patterns, language structures, and knowl-

edge of English. Structure cues also come from the child's own natural language.

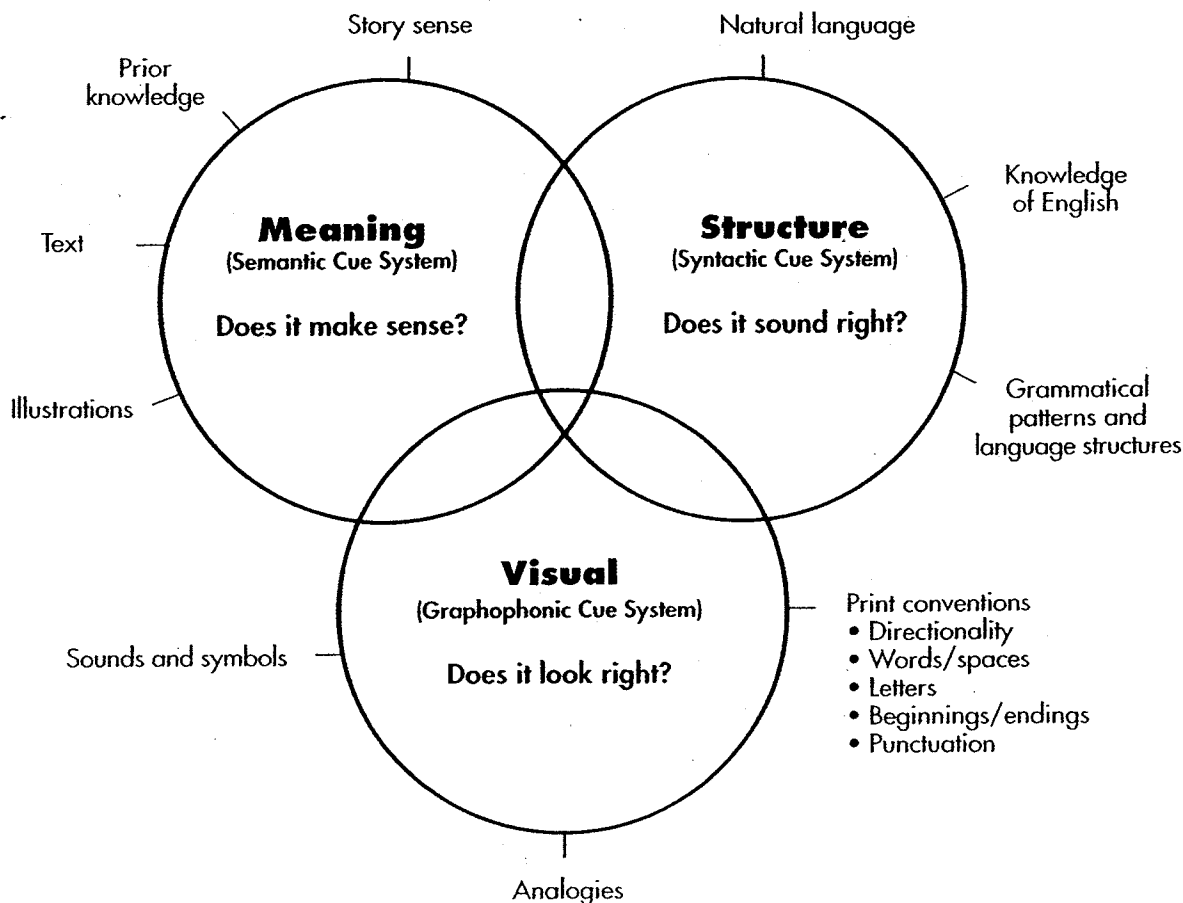
- **Visual or graphic (graphophonics):** based on children's knowledge of letter-sound relationships and print conventions. Visual cues also come from the child's understanding of letters and words.

Beginning emergent readers tend to rely heavily on one cue system, generally the visual/graphophonic. Good readers independently use the three cue systems within the reading process so quickly that their use may appear to be simultaneous.

The cue systems are shown in detail in chart 13, "The Three Reading Cue Systems." (This chart was first discussed in chapter 1, "Introduction to Guided Reading," and is repeated here with this more specific discussion.) The teacher's

Chart 13

The Three Reading Cue Systems



Word analogies - the reader uses what he/she knows about words to figure out unknown words. (and, sand, land...)

Evaluation of Reading

objective in assisting students to read should be to encourage children to use the three cue systems appropriately and successfully so that the children will become independent readers.

Questions and Answers About Guided Reading

Q: *What can I say or do to guide a child to use a specific strategy?*

A: You can guide the child to use a specific strategy or cue system through focused questions:

MEANING

- You said _____. Did that make sense?
- Look at the pictures.
- What happened in the story when...?

STRUCTURE

- You said _____. Did that sound right?
- Can you reread that?

VISUAL

- Does that look right?
- What letter do you expect to see at the beginning/in the middle/at the end of _____?
- What sound do you hear at the beginning/in the middle/at the end of _____?
- Can you get your mouth ready to say that sound?
- Can you point to the words/letters?
- Can you match those words/letters?
- Were there enough words?
- Can you find that word/letter?
- Do you know a word like that?
- Do you know a word that starts/ends with those letters?

Q: *How do I correct a child who reads the wrong word?*

A: If a child reads a word incorrectly, first focus the child on the strategy that he or she was using when the error occurred.

MEANING CUES

Children seldom make meaning errors while reading. If a child uses meaning cues, generally an error is not made. When a child self-corrects an error, meaning is often the reason for the self-correction. Children want what is read to make sense to them. For example, the text said, "The baby is little and cute." The child read, "The baby is little and cut" and immediately self-corrected to "The baby is little and cute." The child was using visual/graphic cues when the error was made but used meaning to self-correct because what was read didn't make sense to the child. In this case, your comment might be, "You really did a good job of going back and rereading this part so that it would make sense," or "You're right, *cut* and *cute* do begin the same, but *cut* didn't make sense in this story." As an alternative, you could simply ask the child why he or she went back and self-corrected.

STRUCTURE CUES

If the child was using structure cues when the error occurred, you might want to focus on visual and/or meaning strategies. For example, the text said, "This is my puppy." The child read, "This is my dog." This type of misreading is common in natural language or structure.

Direct the child to use visual cues to figure out the word. Have the child say the letter/sound found in the incorrect word and then ask the child to locate that letter/sound in the text. Ask the child what letter/sound he or she does see in the text or what that word might be. You might comment, "Yes, *dog* sounds right and it does make sense in this story, but let's look at the word. Could that word be *dog*? What does *dog* begin with? What does this word begin with? What do you think it could be? Get your mouth ready to say the beginning sound and reread this sentence."

VISUAL CUES

If the child was using visual cues when the error occurred, you might want to focus on meaning or structure or both. For example, the text said, "Ben lives in a house." The student read, "Ben lives in a horse." It is common for a child to look only at the initial sound of a word and not pay attention to the rest of the word or to the meaning of the sentence.

Guide the child to use meaning to discover if the sentence/picture is about a horse. Ask, "What else would make sense here?" or "Where else could Ben live?" You might comment, "Yes, that could be *horse*. This word begins like *horse*, but would *horse* make sense in the story? What would make sense in this story?"

Q: What if a child makes an error and then self-corrects?

A: This is exactly what you want to happen! Self-correction is an important step toward reading independence and a self-improving system.

When children self-correct a word or words:

- They have noticed or heard something is wrong.
- They have taken a more careful look.
- They have applied a new strategy to get it right.

You can guide children to self-correct by asking carefully focused questions:

- There was a tricky part here. Can you find it?
- Can you reread that to see if it makes sense/sounds right/looks right?
- Were you right?
- Why did you stop/go back? What else did you notice?
- How did you know that was _____?
- It could be _____, but look at _____.
- It does look like it could be _____. Check to see if it makes sense/sounds right/looks right in this story.

The end goal of Guided Reading is to develop within each child a self-improving, self-extending system. The teacher's aim is to develop independent readers whose reading and writing improves each and every time they read and write.

According to Marie Clay, the independent student has strategies that are secure and habituated and that free the reader to attend to other concepts of reading. The independent reader

- Monitors his or her own reading and writing

- Searches for cues in meaning, in word sequences, in letter sequences
- Discovers new things for himself or herself
- Cross-checks one cue system against another
- Self-corrects, reflecting use of multiple strategies
- Strives to increase his or her speed, fluency, and accuracy

(Adapted from *Reading Recovery: A Guide for Teachers in Training* by Marie M. Clay [Heinemann 1993].)

The educator and author Yetta Goodman calls the observation of children "kidwatching." Just as a bird-watcher learns to identify birds that are far away by spotting the merest flicker of a wing or tail, so you will become an expert kidwatcher as you become attuned to catching the details in children's reading and writing behavior. The more you practice observing, evaluating, and tailoring teaching strategies to individual children's needs, the more fascinating this study will become.



What are structure cues?

Structure cues are based upon the word order or “syntax” of the text in the story. From about the age of five, all children have an understanding of the syntax of their native language. Therefore, the child using structure cues would ask, “Does it make sense to say it that way?” or “Would it sound right to say it that way?”

One must remember, however, that the language structures used in text often differ from the children’s understanding of their native language. This is why it is important to rehearse unusual language structures in text with children during a book introduction.

Children should evaluate their predictions of the text in the story *up to and including the substitution or predicted word in question*. Does their word make an acceptable language construction. If a predicted word does not make sense in the syntax of the printed language, they should monitor the discrepancy, and go back to make a self-correction. (The following example comes from the Wright Group book, *Stop*, page 6-7. The full text of this book is located on page 26 of your *Guided Reading* manual.)

Text: “Stop,” said the girl, but the truck went on.

Reader’s									
Response:	√	√	√	√	<u>and</u>	√	√	√	√
					but				

Analysis: “and the truck went on.” This substitution is a good English language construction. Since analysis takes place up to and including the error, it does sound right to say, “Stop,” said the girl, and . . .
but the substitution is not visually similar.

In this case, it even has meaning to say, “and the truck went on.” But one must be sure that the child was using meaning. In this story, the truck goes on “in spite of the screams of caution given by several people.” Therefore, semantically, it seems more appropriate to say “but the truck went on” instead of “and the truck went on.” Is the child truly using meaning or just a word that fits according to language structure?

What are visual cues?

Visual cues **are not** cues the child gains by looking at the picture. Visual cues are the letters, words, punctuation, and sometimes increased print size that the author uses to communicate the story. Some reading specialists call these cues graphophonic cues.

To determine if a reader was attending to visual cues, the teacher would analyze the substitution to determine if it looks like the printed text.

(The following example comes from the Wright Group book, *Stop*, page 14. The full text of this book is located on page 26 of your *Guided Reading* manual.)

Text: . "Stop," said the traffic light.

Reader's					
Response:	√	√	√	<u>tree</u>	√
				traffic	

Analysis: The substitution of "tree" for "traffic" looks similar. The child appears to be using the first two letters of the word.

The substitution does not make use of meaning cues from the picture (i.e. there is no tree in the action of the picture).

The substitution does not make sense in the context of this story (i.e. It is not a Christmas story with "tree lights").

What cue is the reader really using?

Many times teachers assume a child is using a specific cue when they make a substitution because the miscue fits the text. Often, however, they have no evidence that the child really used that cue. Keen observing and “kid watching” is necessary to be sure which cue a child is using. For example, note the substitution in the following example.

(The following example comes from the Wright Group book, *Stop*, page 4. The full text of this book is located on page 26 of your Guided Reading manual.)

Text: "Stop," said the boy, but the truck went on.

Reader's Response:

✓	✓	✓	✓	<u>bang!!</u>	<u>—</u>	<u>—</u>	<u>—</u>	<u>—</u>
				but	the	truck	went	on.

Analysis: The child remembers the story and knows that the truck wrecks at the end of the story. Therefore, the reading of the story with this substitution preserves that meaning.

Up to the point of error, it makes sense to say, “Bang!” when analyzing the structure of the substitution.

The substitution of “bang” for “but” is visually similar when one considers the first letter. Therefore, many teachers would say the reader is also using visual cues. Are visual cues really being used? If the reader does not show evidence of voicing the first letter and then say “Bang,” it is doubtful that visual cues were being used. If the child does not show previous evidence of being able to identify and verbalize the first sound of a word and make a guess, it is even more doubtful that visual cues were being used.

Teachers should expand this example to guide them in determining the use of meaning and structure cues when analyzing a reader's substitutions. Always observe the child in the reading act and reflect on the child's previous performance. Be sure they have attended to a particular cue and have mastered the skills necessary to use that cue.

What are self-corrections?

When strategic readers monitor their reading, they often notice that a substitution does not conform to all cues in text. They notice the discrepancy, go back and sample other sources of information (cues), and correct their error. Self-corrections require the reader to search for and use other cue sources, making sure they are interpreting the author's message.

When teachers analyze running records, it is useful for them to notice which cues were used when the child makes a substitution. But, they should also notice the cues that were used to make a self-correction.

Consider the following example:

(The following example comes from the Wright Group book, *Stop*, page 2-3. The full text of this book is located on page 26 of your *Guided Reading* manual.)

Text: "Stop," said the milkman, but the truck went on.

Reader's Response: √ √ √ √ √ √ √ bang | SC
on

Analysis: First, analyze the substitution made by the child.

Again, the child remembers the story and knows that the truck wrecks at the end of the story. Therefore, the reading of the story with this substitution preserves that meaning.

There is no visual similarity between the substitution "bang" and "on."

"Bang" fits the language structure of the sentence.

Then analyze the self-correction made by the child.

When the reader self-corrects, the teacher must observe what the reader did to self-correct. If a statement is made such as, "There is no 'b' there! That word is 'on.'" Then, the word is immediately corrected.

The child used visual cues, cross-checking letter sound associations and known words.

"But the truck went bang | SC. "
on

This self-correction does result in a word "on" which fits the language structure of the sentence. But, did the child really use structure? From the observation described above, it would appear that only visual information was used to self-correct.

Cues vs.Strategies

Remember that cues and strategies are different. Cues are sources of information the reader uses to gain the author's message. Strategies are how the reader goes about searching for and cross-checking these sources of information. Strategies define the reader's ability to use cues to gain the author's message.

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References:

Clay, Marie. (1993). Reading Recovery: A Guidebook for Teachers in Training. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Road to Independence: Critical Behaviors at the Point of an Unknown Word

CRUCIAL!!

**WHAT READING WORK DOES THE CHILD DO AT
THE POINT OF AN UNKNOWN WORD?**

DOES HE:

1. Work on it? Not give up?
2. Re-read? (Structure)
3. Re-read and say the first part of the word?
(Structure and Visual)
4. Check picture and predict what would make sense?
(Meaning)
5. Look through the words — any chunks?
“or” in morning? (Visual)
6. Use his own special cues; some unique connection
to another word he knows? (Visual)
i.e., new word *SAM*,.....known word *AM*
(Child must do this for himself.)
7. Do blending analysis? (Meaning, Structure, Visual)
i.e., m/or/n/ing (adding each sounded
graphophonic unit to the previous one while
thinking about meaning and structure cues.